

# Who Was Darius the Mede?

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Baked clay cylinder of Nabonidus, inscribed with a prayer on behalf of his son, Belshazzar, King of Babylon, when it was captured by Darius the Mede.

(In this article, Dr. Whitcomb gives a very brief summary of his new book entitled, *Darius the Mede*, which is being published this winter by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company—Ed.)

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The Book of Daniel has long been a battleground of Biblical criticism. The reason for this is not to be found in the lack of historical information concerning the date and authorship of the book, but rather in the very nature of the book itself. For the Book of Daniel claims to be a sixth century B.C. document which sets forth, among other things, a series of prophetic visions outlining the course of world history down to the time of Christ and beyond.

Being unwilling to accept the possibility that God revealed to Daniel the future history of the world, critics have attempted to discredit the book by searching diligently for historical errors and inconsistencies. Not long ago, it was claimed that King Belshazzar, mentioned several times in the fifth chapter of Daniel, never existed in history. But many cuneiform documents have been unearthed in the Near East which mention him by name and refer to him as being entrusted with the kingship during the final years of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.

But now Darius the Mede, who is introduced in the Book of Daniel as the ruler of Babylon following the fall of that city to the Persians in 539 B.C., has become the main target of critical attacks. Professor H. H. Rowley, of Manchester, England, one of the outstanding Old Testament scholars in the world, asserted that "the claim of the Book of Daniel to be a work of history, written by a well-informed contemporary, is shattered beyond repair by this fiction of Darius the Mede."

## The Documents Speak

However, in spite of such confident assertions on the part of modern critics of the Bible, it is becoming increasingly evident that there **was** such a monarch in Babylonia during the years which immediately fol-

lowed the Fall of Babylon. Dozens of cuneiform documents have come to light that make mention of a "Gubaru the Governor of Babylon and the Region beyond the River" from the year of Babylon's fall in 539 B.C. down to the year 525 B.C. Especially in one cuneiform tablet, named the Nabonidus Chronicle, important information concerning this Gubaru is found. This tablet tells us that Cyrus entered Babylon shortly after its conquest by Persian troops and that Gubaru, his governor, appointed governors in Babylon. This fits perfectly the Biblical statement that "it pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty satraps" (Dan. 6:1).

Soon after the Fall of Babylon, Cyrus left the country to continue his conquests in the eastern part of the empire. He left all the governmental powers of "Babylon and the Region beyond the River" (equivalent to the entire "Fertile Crescent" from the Persian Gulf around to Palestine) in the capable hands of Gubaru. In this vast area lived many millions of people, divided into many "nations and languages" (Dan. 6:25). Many documents of this period state that those who committed crimes would bear the "guilt of a sin against Gubaru, the governor of Babylon and the Region beyond the River." Thus, Gubaru ruled almost as an independent monarch over a large portion of the Near East for at least fourteen years.

## Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian

In a desperate attempt to discredit the Word of God, modern critics claim that the Book of Daniel depicts Darius the Mede as an absolutely **universal** sovereign. But Daniel 9:1 states that Darius the Mede "was **made** king over the realm of the **Chaldeans**." This

clearly indicates that Darius was appointed to be king by someone else and that his dominion was not universal but confined to the regions formerly ruled by the Chaldeans. Daniel 6:28 portrays Daniel as prospering not in the consecutive reigns of two independent sovereigns, but during the reigns of two contemporary rulers, one being subordinate to the other ("so this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian"). We find an instructive analogy in Belshazzar, who could only offer to Daniel the **third** position in the kingdom because his own father Nabonidus was the supreme monarch of Babylonia at the time (Dan. 5:7, 16, 29).

In opposition to this, the critics point to the decree which Darius the Mede issued (Dan. 6:7, 12), that none might ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days. Although such a decree might sound ridiculous to modern ears, it was not so in the ancient Orient; and the fact that it was confined to the realm of Darius the Mede only is confirmed by the wording of the second decree: "in all the dominion of **my kingdom**" (Dan. 6:26). Also, the phrase "in all the earth" (Dan. 6:25) can be rendered "in all the land."

Of course, there is much more that we would like to know from secular history about Gubaru. As yet, the contemporary documents tell us nothing of his nationality, parentage, personal characteristics, or age. But we are convinced that if and when such information comes to light, it will be found to confirm the Word of God which describes him as "the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes" (Dan. 9:1), and as being sixty-two years old when Babylon fell to the Medes and Persians (Dan. 5:31).